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## Lessons from War

*This version of the article has been edited for size. The original can be found at [https://www.dropbox.com/s/sgnwr4mfcy7jpqp1/Lessons war article Full version.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/s/sgnwr4mfcy7jpqp1/Lessons%20war%20article%20Full%20version.pdf). Wherever you see an \* it represents a footnote in the longer article that has been removed in this version. The endnotes and works referenced have both been edited.*

### The Deception

In April 1943, on a moonless night off the coast of Huelva, Spain, an already dead Glyndwr Michael floated into history as “the man who never was.” In reality, twice dead, he played a pivotal role in what has been called the most successful deception in military history: Operation Mincemeat.\* The German leaders believed the letters he was carrying were authentic, accepted that he was real, and even went to some length to check the veracity of his life and relationships. In response, they moved their forces to another location allowing the Allied army to invade Sicily—resulting in a rousing successful deception.

Many wars are fought with deception. It should come to us as no surprise, therefore, in our battles in life, that we will face many issues designed to move us away from the real goals, just as in Operation Mincemeat. Individually, as well as corporately in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and even more specifically within the missiological community of people sharing the Good News in the world today, we are in a war about truth, about focus, about the appropriate use of our energies. These are the critical issues for our time, our mission, and our organization.

Therefore our real battles are about constantly struggling against deception from our enemies so that we do not make the same mistake the Germans did.\* Now, please do not misunderstand me, I am not referencing Islam here, or other groups of people, or even theologians who do not agree with us. In fact, I do not mean human, theological, or political enemies at all—though we often feel we are surrounded by those also. But, actually, according to both Ephesians 6:12 and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 we are

not fighting against flesh and blood. Our enemies are not human.

We are fighting against the powers and principalities of evil in high places; we are fighting deeper ideologies than people can manipulate. We are fighting to keep the proper focus. Otherwise, we can be in danger of missing the point(s) and moving our forces to the wrong places of battle completely. Therefore, we are left vulnerable to attack in the areas most needing defense.

### Operation Cookie Cutter

Is it possible that the *enemy* of this work would want us to focus on just a part of the process instead of the whole? Is it possible that we could turn our energies towards only one aspect and miss the bigger issues?

For the sake of example, what if I were to begin to forget the other parts of the process in making delectable cookies? What if I were to simply focus on my cookie cutter and my job, and forget that I am simply one part of a process in making finished cookies. Or, if I were to begin judging others with different shapes and sizes (even if they had the same recipe). Worse still, what if I were completely confused at the role of the cookie cutter and began using it on play dough to offer to my family (I have done that, and the taste is memorable for sure, but not good). What if the shape, size, or methodology of the cookie cutter becomes the obsession instead of the recipe and the loving purpose of cookies? That would be a tragedy, a horrible deception.

For lack of a better analogy, I would like to suggest that we are seeing the effects of a sinister deception that we might call Operation Cookie Cutter. It has many implications for our work and I would like to identify a few of them and discuss them with you. These are things that I see while working in the field. The observations are not limited to Indonesia or Asia, though some examples may come from there. I have been traveling and speaking in many countries, continents, and churches over the last ten years and I have seen these issues rise up repeatedly. I am offering you a glimpse into my thoughts about the inroads that Operation Cookie Cutter is making in our family, our church family.

Now, before I go forward there is one caveat that I must share. This article is not about attacking the family recipe or its cookies! It is not about attacking the cookie cutter. It is about making sure that we all remember what our goal is: delicious cookies of love to a world that needs to know they are loved by God. The goal is the cookies, not the cookie cutter.

### What Is the BEST Method?

Wherever I travel I am always asked the same question at some point

or another. “So, what is your method of reaching out to Muslims?” Or, put another way, what is the best method for “converting” Muslims and making them Seventh-day Adventists?<sup>1</sup> Along with those questions there will be a time of discussion as the various lines are drawn and judgments made regarding the various methods or even people that the questioner knows about or has been told rumors about. Further highlighting this, I have even been asked to share how well my “crusades” with Muslims have been going lately?!? I was shocked—do we even listen to the words we use?\*

I listen; I try not to cause unnecessary trouble, normally; and then I endeavor to raise the conversation beyond this understanding of methods. Through the years, I have met people from around the world who are segregated into various camps of methods: holistic ministry, studying prophecy, inside ministry, using the Qur’an, using the Bible only, studying a set series of one sort or another, health ministries, medical missions, acts of service, even financial benefits connected with the new beliefs: jobs, scholarships, lower tuition, etc. The list is quite long and the opinions attached to the list can be even longer. But, what normally happens in these discussions is judgment, argument, and disunity. I would like to suggest that these attitudes are the telltale marks of Operation Cookie Cutter.

Instead of unity and encouragement among those using the various approaches we fall into attacking, judging, and even vilifying others who have a different shaped cookie cutter. Whereas we could realize that the point is the recipe and the finished cookie to be enjoyed and shared, and that there may be many ways of shaping that recipe in its specific contexts; instead, we degrade into little judges checking out each other’s shapes to make sure they are okay *according to our standards*.\*

This is very dangerous and misses the point. First of all, discussions like this often bring far more heat than light since the group of people educated enough to discuss the context, the work, and the issues connected with this subject are quite limited. But, unfortunately, that does not limit the voices of those talking. Alas, for some, facts are not necessarily prerequisite for opinions and websites can be quickly populated without appropriate perspective.

### The Wrong Questions

But even more importantly, the real reason that this is missing the point is that we are asking the wrong questions.\* God’s people should not have many methods for this work. We have already been told the best method. Or, to stay in the metaphor, we have the best recipe for sharing with others. One recipe, yet with many possible shapes.

That recipe is true love, even disinterested love.<sup>2</sup> As Adventists we all

know and often quote from *Ministry of Healing*, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (White 1905:143). But, what do we mean when we say that? Of course we all agree with the quote, for that is not in question. The deeper question is: What does it mean?

Christ’s method alone. Simple. Direct. So, there are not many “methods” that bring success, but his only. But, what is that method? His work was simply love. Love lived out in tangible ways with everyone he met. Love was in all he did. His was an intentional process of loving and inviting others to follow.

But, love is not fast. Love is not easily counted, and love does not look the same each time. Love is messy. Herein are the seeds of deception that we face in Operation Cookie Cutter.

At some point in our perceived need to quantify work, we may have forgotten love and looked for fast results or for identifiable markers. Somewhere, in an effort to measure success in outreach work, we have moved from the taste of the cookie to the count of the output. At some point love has grown strings. Mission and methods are merged and are judged by their end results. As soon as this approach is accepted we have missed the point and moved our energies to the wrong place.\*

Hiding below the questions of which method is best is a subtle switch: whichever way gets the best results must be the one method to use. So, the measure becomes numbers over character. But what determines the best results? Numbers or taste? Quantity or quality? This is the result of the Cookie Cutter deception that moves our resources from Christ’s template of success to a myriad of other ideas disconnected from the bigger picture of love.

We do many good things but often only enough to get certain results. Actions, studies, medical care, whatever, is seen simply as a tool in order to achieve the desired result. That is not love; that is salesmanship or a long term investment!

Love is not a technique. It is the fruit of a life filled with love. Fruit. Not a cookie cutter. Fruit is not pushed. It will not be standardized. Love will grow naturally in a heart filled with love. Healthy trees naturally produce fruit. Love cannot be forced. Love will not force.\*

So, the conversation changes to methods instead of love, techniques instead of touching lives. Let me illustrate this reality in two ways.

### **What Is the Motivation?**

First, when I teach and preach, I remind our church about the beauty

of our message. How, rightly understood and rightly shared in our lives, we can openly share it with Muslims and invite them into a journey of end-time faith preparing for the return of Jesus Christ that will naturally and eventually lead them to be a vibrant part of the final remnant in the last days. Yet, invariably, regardless of country or continent, a pastor will make a statement like this: "That will take a long time and I have to produce a certain number of baptisms each year in order to keep my job."

Let me pause and let you read that again. From the perception of many pastors, baptisms are not the fruit of lives being loved, but a measurement of the effectiveness of someone's work; thereby, causing the pastors to baptize people as quickly as possible in order to gain the needed numbers. Therefore, the search is for techniques that produce the fastest, countable results, instead of true, disinterested love.

I wish the above situation was unique and rare. It is not. I hear it over and over and in various locations. The Cookie Cutter deception is taking root. Unfortunately, it does not end here.

There are even accusations of money being paid to people to help them decide earlier in order to have a sufficient result for shortened reaping meetings (especially if a foreigner is involved). God forbid! But, that is a logical outgrowth of Operation Cookie Cutter: having the wrong focus leads to very poor, even unethical results. When the count and the cut is paramount, the cookie suffers.

Before you respond in defense, I will finish it for you. I am not judging anyone and I am not saying this is an evil or intentional choice on the part of any pastor—and, I will quickly add, I do not think it is an obvious or evil choice on the part of the administration, anywhere. It is simply the devolved situation that Operation Cookie Cutter causes. I choose to believe that it is rare and is not encouraged. In fact, I have heard public presentations calling our people back to a more holistic picture of our work in the world.<sup>3</sup> I applaud those messages, and I am grateful for the leadership of those leaders speaking out.

However, when I speak, I remind the pastors over and over that their goal is much more than superficial results. In order for them to consider their motivations for what they do I ask these pivotal questions. Are we organized for missions *or* do we do missions to build the organization? I keep preaching and sharing that concept and I hope they are listening so we can begin turning back the results of Operation Cookie Cutter. I have literally spent hours talking with pastors imploring them to stand up and go against the effects of this diabolical deception. Many are listening and choosing to be men of courage to do what is right, regardless of the cost.\*

Yet, these stories are told by church members. They cannot be hidden. The picture of the church and its goals are being eroded in the eyes of

many members, let alone the public. More offshoots grow up, more voices attack the church. In response to the attacks, more programs are developed to try to revive support for the church, all the while many fail to see the insidious erosion taking place.\*

### More Inroads

Now, the second illustration will bring this closer to home for the rest of the world, not simply Asia. In 2007, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons shared shocking conclusions from their research about the up and coming generation in the United States. The results reflect the effects of post-modernism and globalization on the generation of 19-40 year olds. But, more than those forces, the book charts the results of another reality that is similar to what we are discussing.

The book is called *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity. . . and Why It Matters*. As I listened to this book and afterwards purchased a hard copy, I was amazed at what they found. You might wonder why it would apply to my work in Asia. Good question, yet even though this research is limited to the United States, the evidence suggests that as post-modernism and globalization sweep across the rest of the world, the same results will quickly follow. And, in the age of 3G cell phones and the internet's explosive growth, what used to take years to transfer can now happen in a number of months. So, the findings of *Unchristian* may already be a reality in other parts of the world simply because of those two combining factors.

Yet, in addition to the telltale signs of post-modern thinking and globalization present already in my area, there is another reason, more internal, that must be acknowledged: the actual witness of Christianity. As we have already discussed, with Operation Cookie Cutter eroding the motives and focus of the work from quality to quantity, it also does something else. It destroys the true power of our witness.

The reason for the title *Unchristian* is very telling. In their own words the authors say it "reflects outsiders' most common reaction to the faith: they think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be. . . . [and] for many people the Christian faith looks weary and threadbare. They admit they have a hard time actually seeing Jesus because of all the negative baggage that now surrounds him" (2007:13). The research reported in the book is timely, challenging, and cannot be ignored if we want to reverse the effects of Operation Cookie Cutter.

Here is more evidence pointing to this finely crafted deception we are mired in. Kinnaman and Lyons describe from their research the top six things that outsiders think of Christians, things that Christians have por-

trayed to the world. All of these six were above 60%, and the top three closer to 80% of outsiders thinking this way when they meet a Christian. Imagine this, walking up to a person and when they find out you are a Christian, they have the following perception of you: you are (1) hypocritical, (2) too focused on getting converts, (3) anti-homosexual, (4) sheltered, (5) too political, and (6) judgmental (2007:27).

### Shocking and Tragic Perceptions

To describe it in more street language, one outsider said this, “Most people I meet assume that Christian means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, antigay, anti-choice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders; they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn’t believe what they believe” (2007:24). Wow! Breathe again and consider those words.

What a tragic statement to describe the people who are supposed to be known for following Christ. People who as their highest mark of commitment to Christ should be love. Verses like John 13:35, Rom 13:8, Eph 4:12-16, 1 Thess 4:9, 1 John 3:11, 1 John 4:7, all flood my mind at times like this and I cry out, “What has happened?” That perception of Christians is not what it should be! Apparently, in the eyes and experience of many in the United States, Christians have not been living Christ’s method. People are not seeing love. It seems that Operation Cookie Cutter as I am describing it here has had its effect on the greater Christian church as well, not only in our church, our evangelism, our Sabbath Schools, or board meetings! We would be wise to heed these words and perceptions.

This research forces us to acknowledge another component of Operation Cookie Cutter. As our focus changed from character to numbers we inevitably become “plastic people.”\* When discipleship is forgotten and not stressed, results instead of character become a marker for a good church member. If results (or simply the appearance of them) take primacy and the internal, ongoing motivation of love as a disciple of Christ is gradually forgotten, hypocrisy naturally fills the void.

Hypocrisy erodes us from the inside. Unchallenged areas of our life that need to be continually surrendered to Christ begin to overcome us. Broken relationships, prolonged infancies,\* no power to resist evil, bad tempers at home, work, or even at church board meetings, politics, pride, using people, pornography,\* adultery, various other obsessions, and an untold number of other vices begin to violate our lives. All of these are natural outgrowths of the loss of the right focus, and according to the research from *Unchristian*, it is quite evident in the world, today!\*

Interestingly enough, Ellen White would not be surprised by this either. Just a few pages away from the one true method of success state-



ment she reminds us again what disinterested love should look like, how true followers can exhibit it, *and* how people will respond to love without strings:

Many have no faith in God and have lost confidence in man. But they appreciate acts of sympathy and helpfulness. As they see one with no inducement of earthly praise or compensation come into their homes, ministering to the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sad, and tenderly pointing all to Him of whose love and pity the human worker is but the messenger—as they see this, their hearts are touched. Gratitude springs up. Faith is kindled. They see that God cares for them, and they are prepared to listen as His word is opened. (1905:145)

So, when people see real, tangible love, their hearts are moved. The way to reverse the deteriorating effects of Operation Cookie Cutter is to go back to truly loving without any strings attached. That method alone will bring success. All the other things we mention are simply ways of showing love. There is one method, yet many expressions of it. Keep the focus on love and we will have many ways to share it. Each church should be a laboratory for learning to love others. Pastors could be using their creativity and leadership skills to marshal other disciples to love and serve their communities.

Now, having said that, let us affirm some very important things. The reason why this is so insidious is that we forget the power of love and the power of character in our lives. Or, to remain in our metaphor, we forget the power of quality and the taste of a great cookie (whatever the shape). I love the way that Ellen White says it so succinctly: “There is an eloquence far more powerful than the eloquence of words in the quiet, consistent life of a pure, true Christian [true believer]. What a man is has more influence than what he says” (1905:469). We need more witnesses to the power of the gospel instead of just finely tuned salespeople trying to get the fastest results possible.

### **Missing Gifts, Missing People**

Another implication of what we have been discussing shows up when we realize that as Operation Cookie Cutter moves our focus from the goal it also limits the people involved in making the cookies. As the goals are fine-tuned and the methods synthesized into various specialized programs we give the impression that only the best can witness or make cookies. That only the professional missionaries or evangelists or ordained, male pastors are trained enough to do real evangelism. This is another



horrendous tragedy, yet an obvious outgrowth of this deception.

As numbers begin to be the goal then people move from love (which anyone filled with God's love can do in a myriad of ways) to techniques, programs, and arguments for the results. We are losing the personal involvement in loving others and it is being replaced by the programs of evangelism. This can take on different views but one that is particularly of interest to our study here is how we have uplifted a few spiritual gifts to the detriment or even loss of others.

Lester Merklin identifies this loss in his article that was presented to the AIIAS Theological Forum in 2004, entitled "The Remnant Mission: To Reveal and Proclaim God's Glory." In that well written reminder, he calls our leaders to focus on the glory of God model instead of the information model, and to bring every program under the scrutiny of how it adds to God's glory.

In addition to that timely and much needed call for us to evaluate all of our activities according to the glory of God, he brings up the work of Kim Johnson. Johnson's work has noted that the normal focus on sharing information only uses three of the twenty-two spiritual gifts (teaching, preaching, and evangelism) while the people with the other gifts seem to simply become, literally, "spectators, cheering from the sidelines" (Merklin 2008:12).<sup>\*</sup> So, our churches tend to become a string of specialized programs where people come to watch and be blessed (you can read that as entertained, for some). Therefore, the churches with the best and most programs have the most people attending while the older, smaller, less "talented" churches suffer.

But, more than turning dedicated disciples into placated pew warmers, it leads to our members feeling unused, unimportant, and if left alone long enough, completely irrelevant to the church and its mission (which will have serious implications for financial giving naturally, since people support what they love and are involved in). As that disconnect deepens with the visible church it then begins to erode the personal connection and relevance of the believer with God himself. This move from our people being trained and committed disciples to entertained participants is devastating to the mission we have in the world (and, I might add, to the long-term viability of our organization).

So, the effects march on, and when we keep asking the wrong question such as, "Which is the best method?" we further alienate the members who have some of the other unused spiritual gifts. This begins a process that weakens our witness, minimizes our members, shrinks our financial giving (tithe and mission offerings), and may very well destroy the organization.

## **Wrong Arguments**

Operation Cookie Cutter shows up in our arguments as well. You can see it in the wrong arguments that we pose in order to get the results we can count. This is particularly a problem for us in Indonesia; yet, I have seen it in other countries as well.

It begins with the perception of what working with Muslims is meant to be. Because the church is a minority here where I work and the ethnic backgrounds of most of the Adventists are different than the larger people groups we have invariably created a process of arguing to defend ourselves: a defensive minority attitude of argument.

Therefore, in the average Adventist mind, witnessing involves knowing how to defend one's faith or to compare and contrast who Adventists are with the greater population, whether other Christian groups or Muslims. For many Adventists, witnessing is sharing the doctrines by whatever means possible as quickly as possible. The goal is to get more Adventists.\* Adventist Muslim Relations for many is simply learning how to specialize in the Muslim arguments. If you can speak Arabic, read the Qur'an, or are a former Muslim, you will be all the better in winning arguments, or so it seems.

So, I am often asked the following questions, randomly collected: "How do we teach the Trinity to Muslims?" "How do we share that Jesus is God?" "How do we prove that Sabbath is the right day?" "How do I convert my Muslim neighbors or get them to come to church?" "Was Muhammad a prophet?" "Is the Qur'an inspired?" "Is Allah the same God that we worship?" These questions go on and on into all the various historic arguments or theological perplexities that have existed between Islam and Christianity for hundreds of years.\*

Of course, there is a time to answer these questions, but not without a solid foundation of a relationship already in place. We need to understand that theology or information alone does not change hearts and, in fact, can often be used to keep others away from their deeper needs. Many in the world and the church have learned to use arguments and information to camouflage their hurting hearts. Or, just as dangerous, it is possible to have all of the right answers and yet still have a rebellious or unrepentant heart.

What saddens my heart, repeatedly, in facing all these questions is that I rarely hear, "How do I build deeper relationships with Muslims so that God's love will be revealed in all that I do?" or "How do I help my Muslim friends to grow in their own relationship with God so that they will love and bless their communities?" or "How can I recognize the evidence of the Spirit of God working in the lives of Muslims so I can encourage them in their growth and end-time faith?"

The lack of questions like these make my heart hurt. I personally find this to be one of our greatest challenges facing the church here in Indonesia. The average member does not love Muslims. Of course, if you asked anyone they will say that they love everyone. But, the reality is, they do not and it shows. We have trouble even getting along within the church where people have many things in common. What happens outside of it is often much worse.

How many Seventh-day Adventists have deep, personal, friendships with Muslims? How many of us regularly attend Muslim events? How many of us would give our lives for a Muslim brother or sister?

Or, do we only engage with them when we want to share? Is the only natural contact with our neighbors a cursory comment or a passing wave as we go off to church to be cloistered for the day? For some, Sabbath means a day of continual meetings in order to keep everyone involved at the church from morning until night\* in activities that are often times completely irrelevant to the local community. Or perhaps we only talk to “outsiders” when we want to make a foray into the enemy camp, as it were? If we were to ask Adventists their impressions and thoughts about Muslims what would it be in reality?\* I have found a tremendous amount of ignorance, judgment, and prejudice.

The painful memories of burned churches, bombs, persecuted members, murdered pastors leave their deep scars. I cannot blame anyone from my privileged position of being raised in a Christian majority country. No, this is not a judgment, I do not blame anyone. The task of loving is actually beyond our capability. That is the point. I actually believe one of the purposes of mission is to constantly confront us with how little we know and how desperately wicked our hearts are, thereby, sending us back to God. I believe, in short, we are called to display God’s glory in our lives and as we go and see the horrible deficits in ourselves we return to him to receive more of his grace so we can go love again. This should be an endless cycle of worship, growth, sharing, and worship, followed by more growth, etc.

But the reality of the injustices experienced remain, and only the power of the incredible gospel can bring forgiveness to those scars. And, only when that happens can love begin to grow. The gospel must go deeper into our lives in order to love like this. But, unfortunately, Operation Cookie Cutter takes the focus away from the power of this incredible gospel and puts it on shallow results of theological agreement (often temporary) by suggesting that we do not have to kill our old nature, we simply need to learn to argue well enough to bring others into our group to feel good about ourselves. That is much easier than dying daily in the Messiah!

Therefore the attitudes are not changed and we focus on sharing the message for the results instead of being the message for the glory of God.

When we use our methods we focus on differences instead of things held in common. Tragically, that default attitude is completely contrary to the ways that we are told to work and love in contexts like this.<sup>4</sup> Love involves building relationships on what is held in common, not emphasizing differences. Love overlooks a multitude of pain and sin and theological discordance. Love instead of theology is the need.

These are hard concepts and they are not limited to Indonesian Adventists. These issues confront each of us. If what Doris Day says is true when she suggests that “I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least,” then this issue cannot be ignored as it affects our very relationship with God. So, the question remains, do we love \_\_\_\_\_?

I left it blank since it is not only Muslims. It could include: blacks, whites, rich, poor, Baptists, Pentecostals, Catholics, non-SDAs, Mandoneses, Bataks, Papuans, meat eaters, non-vegans, Republicans, Democrats, gays, murderers, adulterers, abortionists, liberals, conservatives, etc., you fill in the blank for your own battles.<sup>5</sup> We only love God as much as the least of those. That should send us to our knees in repentance.

Being confronted by the need to love produces repentance and humility. Whereas, Operation Cookie Cutter can make us feel proud of our growth in numbers, all the while numbing us to the deepest lack in our hearts!\*

### **Back to the Goal**

As I work to try to change this perception specifically, and in a larger sense, fight against Operation Cookie Cutter, I am often put in a difficult situation of trying to answer enough of the questions in order to keep the person connected while desperately trying to open their eyes to a bigger, bolder picture of God’s plan and love—God’s glory. Sometimes people can say the right things in the wrong way while others say wrong things in the right way with the right attitude. Determining how to walk that line through affirmation and education is a personal challenge for me.\*

So, the only way that I can see to thwart the insidious effect of Operation Cookie Cutter is to raise our eyes to the ultimate goal of our message. And in doing so, it changes us and recalibrates us in the right direction. In place of the arguments, I endeavor to point out all the many, many similarities that can be built on to form a strong relationship with our Muslim neighbors. I am seeking to lift up truth wherever it can be found and use those truths to point to a larger picture of the character of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. I am working to invite Seventh-day Adventists into a passionate journey of love with God through Christ and as that becomes a reality, I am confident that everyone around them will see the changes. Jesus said, “make a tree good and its fruit will be good” (Matt

12:33). When love is the focus, love changes us and then changes the world through a powerful personal witness. Notice this amazing quote:

It is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. In order to convince others of the power of Christ's grace, we must know its power in our own hearts and lives. The gospel we present for the saving of souls must be the gospel by which our own souls are saved. Only through a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour is it possible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world. If we would draw sinners out of the swift-running current, our own feet must be firmly set upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son [the Messiah] as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian [true believer]. (White 1905:470, bracketed notes supplied)

If we focus on growing healthy people, there will be sufficient fruit. People naturally share what they love. Love motivates. Love transforms. Cookie Cutter quotas do not.

So, in light of all of this, I believe the best way to refocus our energies is to go right back to the basics of our calling as a church to move our focus from results to mission, from organization to discipleship. As we raise our eyes higher than our defined results, we will naturally begin to refocus on the God we serve and love. Very simply, that focus is already what we teach and believe that we have been raised up by God to share within the Three Angels' Messages.

Now, I realize that I am not a theologian, and really, am not a missiologist officially. I know that many far more talented and educated scholars than I have already shown the power of our message and focus through the clarion calls of Revelation 14:6-12. Yet, in light of this paper I would like to share a perspective of these messages specifically framed for a Muslim audience (approximately 1/4 of the world who have not heard these messages this way). And, as we look at them in this light, it will help us to reverse the numbing effects of Operation Cookie Cutter. To do that, I would like to establish a few working definitions.

## Definitions and Questions

For the sake of the continuing conversation some terms need to be defined that will be used to ask some important questions and create a very insightful picture later.

1. Allah: The Arabic word for God used by Arab Christians in the first early centuries of Christianity. After that, from the qur'anic perspective, Allah is the word designating the One, True God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, John the Baptist, Jesus, and many, many more named biblical prophets. Allah is the God of the Bible. This does not imply that everyone sees Allah in the same way, but I am simply making the connection linguistically. Allah is the Arabic word for the monotheistic God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>6</sup>

2. Lower case Islam: Submission or surrender to God. The true religion: submission. All true religion is found in submission to God. This has been in existence since the experience of Adam.

3. Upper case Islam: The official, historic religion of Islam that has nearly 1.6 billion adherents. This includes religious rules, dogma, theology, scripture, culture, and a whole worldview. This religion began in the 7th century.

4. Lower case muslim: A person who is surrendered to God. This is not limited to a religion. In the Qur'an the followers of Jesus/Isa were called muslims (3:52) long before the birth of the religion of Islam.<sup>7</sup>

5. Upper case Muslim: A member or participant culturally and theologically in the religion of Islam. Someone can be Muslim by their culture or their actions and may not necessarily have the same meaning or faith in different locations.

6. Lower case follower of Jesus Christ/Isa al Masih: This is a person who worships God and follows the teachings and life of Jesus as the Messiah. They believe in the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Jesus as the one who brought humanity back into connection with God. As a conscientious follower of Jesus Christ, they are living their lives surrendered to God and trying to bring all of their life into line with Jesus' life and teachings.

7. Christian/Christianity: A member or participant in the official religion of Christianity. This can include cultural identification, theological beliefs, or simply historic roots in any of the many denominations throughout history. Some would say the religion of Christianity began sometime in the first century while others might say in the 4th century, but most would agree either way that it was not created by Jesus Christ, or that he did not come to create a new religion.<sup>8</sup> The designation Christian might not mean a faith statement, but merely a cultural or ethnic connection or family heritage in some areas.

8. Lower case adventist: A person who believes in the soon return of Jesus Christ as King and master over the Kingdom of God, or someone who is living their lives in preparation for that day.

9. Upper case Adventist: A member of the Adventist Church as it is recognized in many countries.\* Adventist is a worldwide designator and I believe should be thought of differently than just another Christian denomination. We should try to consider ourselves as a worldwide movement larger than Christianity or maybe even as another world religion.<sup>9</sup> Membership in this organization does not necessarily mean someone is a solid believer, it can be a cultural distinction in some locations.

10. Babylon: A name of a historic place. Many references are in the Bible including the tower of Babel where God confused the people's languages, where God sent his people for discipline in exile, and where in the book of Revelation the name is used to illustrate the end time set of beliefs or confusion that stands in contrast to the true religion of obedience to God and faith in the Messiah. For our purposes, I would also like to add a larger, less technical definition of simply, confusion. Any system of belief, -ism, or religion that is anchored in human belief that people can save themselves or that people do not need God. In the last days, Babylon will be the confusion of all the various systems rebelling against the true God.

With these working definitions I would like to ask just a few questions before looking at the message of Revelation 14:6-12. As you ask these questions, be as honest as you can and stay within the range of the above definitions. As we ask these questions we are not judging others or individuals, but simply wanting to establish certain relationships that might not otherwise become clear. It will all come together in the end as we focus on our message.

Question 1: Are all Muslims muslim? Or, according to the definitions and as practice for the questions that follow: Are all cultural Muslims also truly submitted to God in their lives? Most people, even Muslims would acknowledge, when given these definitions, that not all Muslims are Muslim.

Question 2: Are all Christians actually followers of Jesus? Again, most Christians would also admit that there are cultural Christians who are not necessarily following Jesus.

Question 3: Would all true followers of Jesus also believe in or be living in a state of Islam? Given the above definitions I would say that yes, true followers of Jesus also are submitting to God, therefore, they are muslims.

Question 4 (just to be fair): Are all Adventists also living as adventists? If we are choosing to be honest we must also acknowledge that this is not always the case.



Now, the next few questions are more for your continued thoughts to prepare yourself for the beauty of our message.

Question 5: Is it possible for a Muslim to be a muslim, a follower of Jesus, and an adventist?

Question 6: Is it possible for an Adventist to be a muslim, a follower of Jesus, and an adventist? I am assuming that you are not only saying yes, but you see that this would be the goal for true Adventists according to our definitions.

Question 7: What has been the historic relationship between Islam and Christianity? What is the relationship now?

This will all be brought together as we look at the Three Angels' Messages through a different lens than is usually used.

### **Fantastic Focus, Revelation 14:6-12**

I will not list the actual verses since they are already well known. But, I would like to walk through the distinct messages and highlight or illustrate them with our supplied definitions. As we do this something absolutely amazing emerges. We will see a message that is clear, compelling, and one that we can openly share with Muslims.

The First Angel is commissioned to share the everlasting gospel with everyone in every place. What is that gospel? What is the good news? Without taking too much time and space here as many have spent their lives expounding on this beautiful subject, I would like to suggest a very simple definition. It is good news, not advice. It is comprehensive and succinct. It is stating the new way of life after the brokenness in Adam. It is the message described in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21,

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Through the Messiah, we have been reconnected with God. That is wonderful news for all of humanity. God has made peace with us, we can stop the war with him. So, this gospel is simply letting people know, wherever and whoever they are that they are accepted and reconnected with God through the Messiah.

The message is actually defined further with some interesting words.

What is to be shared with the world is the call to fear God, give him glory, the time of judgment has arrived, and we are to worship him, the Creator. So, knowing that this is not new to anyone in the Adventist missiological community I will not parse the meanings of these things. But, let me rephrase those words as a Muslim could hear them and how our definitions allow us to consider them. Later I will put these words into a diagram.

Fearing God and giving him glory could be summarized into the true definition of islam or what a true muslim is. Therefore, this first message is a call to be truly muslim in a state of islam. As true believers they are to prepare for judgment, to be surrendered believers in a world of rebellion. From a Muslim perspective, the time of judgment is already connected with the return of Jesus thereby meaning that Muslims are looking for what we call the second coming. Therefore, according to our simple definitions, a true muslim Muslim already has the seeds of being an adventist.\* With the message's unavoidable focus on the Creator we obviously can teach a biblical (and even qur'anic) picture of creation culminating in the purpose and beauty of Sabbath. All of these wonderful connections are already available to us in this first message. Stated in this context, we can quite freely share this in a fully monotheistic way that will be very acceptable and even welcomed by many Muslims.

But, there is more. The second angel proclaims that Babylon (the world's ways of dealing with things) is fallen. All of the world's isms have failed to deal with the deepest heart needs: fanaticism, materialism, hedonism, communism, globalism, postmodernism, terrorism, conservatism, liberalism, capitalism, even Americanism. All have failed, all will fail. Babylon, confusion, is fallen.

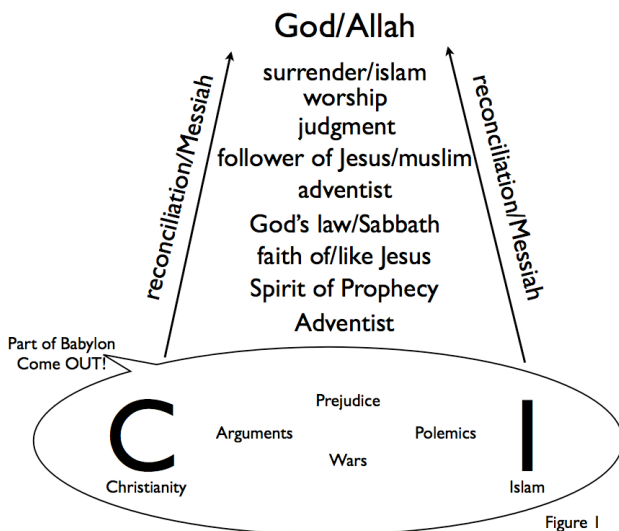
Again, we can boldly share this message with Muslims. They already know that we are in the midst of a deadly cultural war that is literally destroying true faith. They already see the inroads of cultural decay that we often ignore or deny in the West. One of the reasons why it is difficult to separate Muslims who are in support of fighting America with others who would not really want to pick up arms is that so many conscientious Muslims cannot agree with all the things that the world (and they see America as leading) is doing. They cannot sit idly by while their families, children, values, and culture are devastated by the various isms attacking the world right now. So, no, many would not want to fight or be considered as terrorists, but yet, they cannot deny the need to fight for faith.\* If Seventh-day Adventists became known as people living counter culture to Babylon and calling others to realize its diabolical influence on true faith, we would be surprised by all the people standing with us, as well as those against us.

Then there is the third message. If people rebel against God and re-

main in Babylon, they will be judged. If they choose to remain in the place of confusion and rebellion, thereby denying the work of the gospel in the Messiah, then they will be destroyed. The incredible reconciliation provided by the Messiah can be rebelled against and denied. Choosing to remain in Babylon is choosing to die. Therefore, come out! Focus on God, worship, judgment, resting in the God of creation and the God of the Messiah. Come out, do not die!

Again, there would be no problem sharing this message with the Muslim world. In fact, if we begin to share this message clearly, we may be in danger of trouble from the Western world (or its governments) and many Christian groups, but not from the average, non-radical Muslim. To the eyes of Islam, we will be seen as a different group altogether. I am convinced as we rise to our calling we will be surprised to see who joins us, and who leaves!

Finally, as the messages describe the people who are true to this call, the ones who come out, it is very simple. They will be known as true followers of God who obey him and his commandments or laws (instead of the world's laws). God's people have a faith in God like Jesus did (being willing even to die rather than deny God). Their faith is a very simple, even primitive. This is another message that we can boldly share with open minded, searching Muslims. Below is a diagram of what this might look like to a Muslim (and even more beautiful to a muslim).



As you look at this diagram, let me identify a few very important things. Notice that I have grouped Christianity and Islam (as defined in this pa-

per) as part, but not all, of Babylon.\* I have also included within Babylon the various relationships and actions connected between these two “warring” religions: polemics, arguments, hatred, and prejudice to name a few markers of confusion. It is worthy to note as well in this picture, that the Adventist Church is NOT in Babylon.\* Please remember what the focus of the picture is: God/Allah. This is critical. What is our focus?

Observe also that this is a completely monotheistic message! The focus is on calling people out of Babylon and pointing them to the belief, surrender, worship, obedience, and faith in the One, True God. The focus is on God, not Jesus.<sup>10</sup> The message in the final days before the culmination of the judgment is actually a God message instead of a Jesus only message!<sup>11</sup> In other words, Jesus has been the subject that has fueled the battles through the centuries and most of the common polemic exchanges between the religions. Most of the theological arguments and positioning to defend one’s beliefs are normally connected with Jesus.\* Yet, as Adventists, we teach that our prophesied message and focus is on God. We should be the voices calling people back to true, God-focused living. Obviously, as we embrace this prophetic calling and the focused content of these messages we will be empowered to openly share them within the Muslim context (or Jewish for that matter). We have been strategically placed by God at the crossroads of thought and time to share a much needed message.

It is only as we embrace our calling, our unique message, and refocus our energies to a God-centric, end-time calling to the world, will we be the people who God has raised us up to be. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been called by God and organized to share this message. It is both our mandate and our identifier. Regarding our calling of witness within the world of Islam, it is also our open door. And, it is the only way to reverse the anesthetizing effects of Operation Cookie Cutter.

### **Operation Cookie Cutter Exposed**

This is where the picture and solution all come together. The power of Operation Cookie Cutter is in keeping our focus off of who we are and what our message should be. As I have described those inroads already in this article, when we forget that, we begin to focus on the wrong things. Our energies, our programs, our purposes become derailed and even at times, deceived. We become easy targets for the enemy through unethical practices, hypocrisy, and entertained apathy that shows up in our membership and our giving. We begin to think that the world only needs information devoid of personal connection.\* This leads us to focus on numeric growth at the expense of experiential quality in our members. Long-term

discipleship is replaced by short term baptismal goals. This is the fruit of Operation Cookie Cutter.

Churches filled with empty people arguing and searching for as many people as they can to meet the goals. Programs multiplying more and more each year, all the while, brokenness is ravaging hearts, breaking marriages and families all in the name of growth and church work. But, like Paul, we are told to follow him as he follows Christ (see 1 Cor 11:1). We need to get back to that simplistic way of loving and discipling others because the reality is, as it has been said by Suliasi Kurulo, "You give what you know; but you reproduce who you are" (2012). Operation Cookie Cutter is filling our churches with plastic people because we have focused on the wrong goal.

If we were to diagram this situation I think it would look like this.

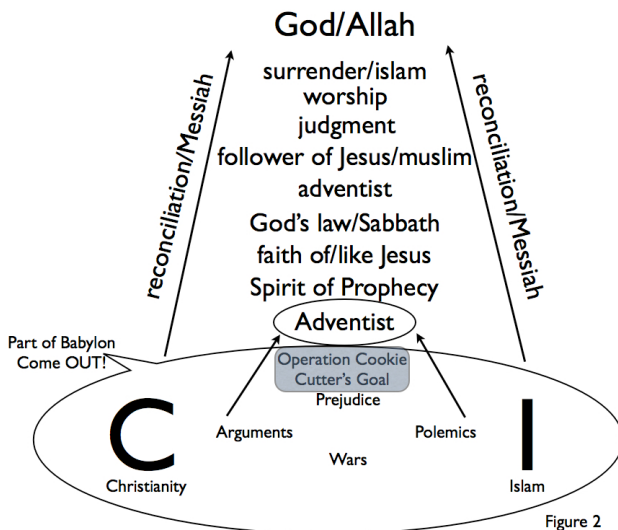


Figure 2

The same picture as before, the same truths that could be shared with the world to set them free, yet the focus degrades to a search for getting people to become Adventists. Finding Christians or Muslims or anyone, overcoming their objections or arguments and showing them how the Adventist Church is better than they are. Methods become the focus of the conversation to determine the best way of getting decisions. Service activities, education, healthcare, evangelism, or informational meetings are all mapped out in an effort to make more Adventists and such attempts are often judged by that criteria as well. The focus is on being Adventist and the evidence of a complete witness or a successful method is measured by

membership. Because the real focus is not a divinely orchestrated transformation of the life, the fruits are pride, emptiness, dry formality, prolonged infancies in the church, rushed baptisms for effect, and institutionalized dysfunction. We have forgotten our goal and are caught up in the count of the cookies. This is how Operation Cookie Cutter works.

But, in God's eyes and what he counts as success, it does not actually work! It is not blessing to the world. It is not preparing a people to be fully committed to God and prepared for the return of Jesus. In God's economy concern for numbers has never overtaken quality.

God's plan is so much more. His final message to the world will not be an information blitz to people already living in an era of information overload. His message is an experiential call to everyone to have the right focus. To come out of the empty systems that continually fail to bring true peace. To be fully his, fully known, and fully loved, and in doing so be transformed to love the world around us. There is a different focus. As we realize this and go back to the basics, as it were, we can undo the damage of Operation Cookie Cutter. This is where the picture diverges and would look like figure 3.

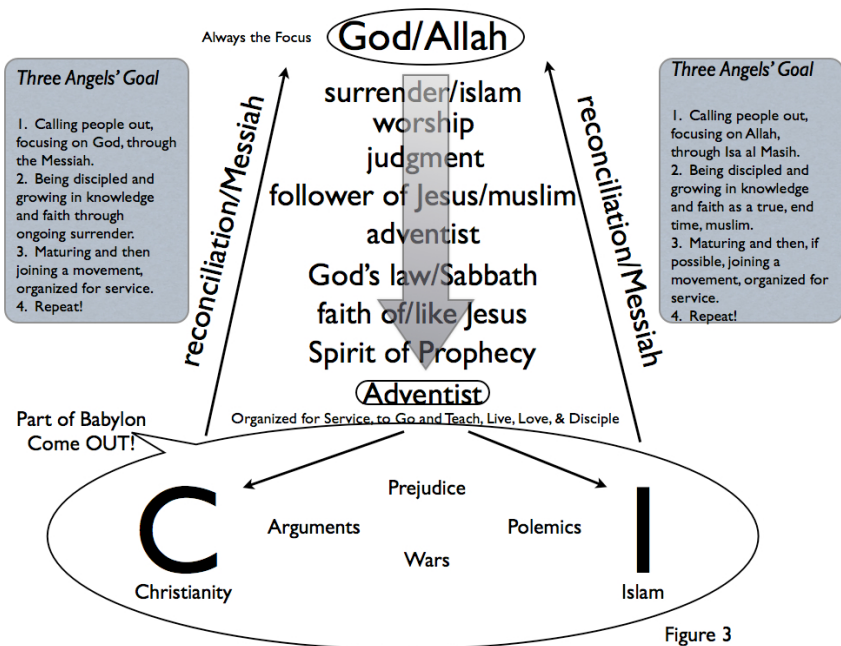


Figure 3

In figure 3 we see the focus of our message being rightly placed on God, always on him, bringing him glory, revealing his character to a world devoid of a true representation of him.<sup>12</sup> As we grow in that surrender, worship, awareness of judgment, following the life and teachings of Jesus (loving the world with that divinely powered love), living lives filled with all the fullness of God, we will be a blessing to the world around us. As submitted people we do not need to argue, we study to learn for ourselves and only share when others want to listen. We are not the judge of another. The love of God constrains us and moves us forward in discipleship and deep heart change that will be reflected in our outward life. As we choose to surrender like this, the Spirit of God will be given to guide us into all truth. We will find the joy of living in the law of life. We will live our inheritance and invite others to do so as well. We will pursue things that are righteous and true, cherishing all of God's messages given to us. As this maturing continues we will find others in this movement that is bringing all these things together, organized to bless others. As long as the focus remains on God, true growth, true fruit will be abundant.

Too simplistic you say? Maybe, but I do not think so. I believe if we become vibrant, lovers of God living every moment in preparation for the return of Jesus, such a life will have a power in the world. It will grow a movement again. It will reverse the damage of Operation Cookie Cutter.

### **Final Applications**

This redirection of focus changes the motives of why we do what we do. It allows us to remain anchored in love without strings. We can love boldly because as we continue to be filled with God's love we are transformed from statistical servants to lavish lovers. As we do that, certain things will naturally happen.

First of all, this will change our relationships with people. We will no longer be looked upon with suspicion as to why we are doing things. People will not feel a nagging sense of betrayal as the conversations are manipulated into a sharing mode after we meet them. We can be fully transparent in whatever circumstance we are in, not needing to have one set of language for some and hiding it from others. We no longer have to concern ourselves with the plan of how God will bring people to his church. As we follow the Spirit, he can act as a GPS taking us places not even on our map. We simply love and let him do his work in his way and time. This frees us to do radical things. We can be completely open about who we are as spiritual end-time people and we can build deep, loving relationships that allow us to naturally share life lessons and truths that have blessed us. Friendship will not be a technique; it will be a natural fruit of love.



As an example of this, we have started a group where I live called *Searah*. It simply means “one direction”<sup>\*</sup> and its goal is fully transparent. We can boldly invite Muslims and Adventists (or anyone of faith) to join with us in being a blessing in the community. There is no veiled agenda to make Muslims into Adventists lurking beneath the surface. In fact, we openly say, we are not trying to change faith, we are building it! It is simply a movement of people of faith choosing to agree on the worship of the One, true God and then choosing to work together to do good. It is based on the assumption that a true follower of God will be a blessing in the world. Simple.

We are creating a new culture for this movement: not an Islamic one; not a Christian one; not even an Indonesian, Western Adventist one; or Asian; or any other syncretistic combination; it is a culture of three things. We call them the three Cs or in the local way of spelling, the three Ks. First a culture of commitment: commitment to God, focusing on him; commitment to ourselves, being the best we can be in our worship of him and our own personal lives; and then a commitment to community, realizing that true faith must bless those around us. Second, we are creating a culture of communication to break down the barriers caused by prejudice, ignorance, and historic differences. We choose to communicate goodness and lift up truth wherever it is found, focusing on things held in common and communicating those with everyone we can through the Internet, in person, and in group networks. Finally, we are building a culture of cooperation. All of these activities are being done through people cooperating to do good. A *Searah* project must have people of various faiths working together. Anything that can help someone’s commitment to grow either with God, themselves, or in the community, can be a *Searah* project if it is shared between people of faith. This will have a wonderful influence as it is embraced.

What is happening is exciting. True friendships and partnerships are being created as Muslims and Adventists come together to be people of faith touching the world around them. We have only just begun, but the fruit is beautiful and lives are being drawn closer to God. That is our ultimate and openly transparent goal. We are able to always maintain a spiritual atmosphere in all we do and can point people to growing in their faith to God in these last days. Building on all we have in common in God we are able to do beautiful things that are blessing lives. Love is blossoming and people are noticing. God is being given glory, and people are growing spiritually to be ready for the return of Jesus. As that journey continues God will change all of us for his ultimate good and goal.

Another application of these pictures that cannot be overlooked is this: I have clearly stated that the church is not Babylon. It is not. It should not

be. But, if we choose to remain under the deception of Operation Cookie Cutter, we can become part of Babylon, at least individually. If our focus shifts away from God and degrades into arguments, temporary results (for man's approval), or hollow experiences then we are in great danger of being judged along with Babylon. We can be a prophetic, even chosen people, and yet if we miss this point, we are in danger of being lost completely.\* God is looking for a people entirely devoted to him and transformed from those lesser motivations.

Therefore, this becomes a great litmus test for each one of our motives. Why do we do things? Is the focus on "methods," arguments, tools, and results, or is it on knowing God, loving God, and inviting others to worship God? This is a critical difference both personally and corporately.

One more application which has specific connection to the daily interaction of Muslims and Adventists in Indonesia is how our relationships could be (not what they currently are). Seventh-day Adventists could be known as the people who are single-mindedly focused on knowing God and being prepared for the return of Jesus Christ. Living our lives with that pristine goal in all we do will change us. Worshiping the Creator, focusing on being godly stewards of the creation, experiencing balanced lives in worship, food, recreation, and even family values are all areas of our lives that could display a power in the world that none could ignore. An Indonesian Adventist living this way, actually, has more in common with most local Muslims than they do the local Christians. If we lived this way, we could be known as the closest people to true Muslims.

As our theology regains its Revelation focus on God we also could be the bridge people to let Muslims learn about the beauty of why Jesus is called the Christ or Messiah in the Qur'an, and why he is said to be a blessing for all of humanity. Then, as Muslims witness the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ they will be richly blessed and empowered to trust God like Jesus did/does. Or, we could be the ones who by our lives could show that the teachings of the Bible are still true and valid and leading to true faith because we also do not eat pork or drink alcohol, disobey God's commands (by his grace), and we also worship one God. In doing so, we could help to resurrect the much needed biblical teachings about the signs of the return of Jesus so that many Muslims will not be deceived in the final moments.\* All of these things combined means that we could and should be the people who spiritual Muslims trust and walk with in these last days. We could be best friends encouraging each other in end-time faith. As we walk together, God will knit hearts and change lives for his glory and he will bring us together.\*

With this focus, we can nurture relationships with Muslims, pointing them away from nominal Islam towards a real and vibrant, end-time is-

lam. We can lift up the beauties of the names of God in our lives and actions.\* We can focus on practical godliness instead of human kingdom building. We can ground people in Scripture and godly community so that their lives are not decimated by the cultural onslaughts of our time. We can be the people of the Book who Muslims are looking for and who they should be standing with in the last days of this war between God and Satan. What a dream that would be to see in Indonesia and the world! That is my dream and I believe God's dream as well.

Waking up from that dream we are back in the war again. According to the other verse connected with the end-time remnant which we often quote, there is the final war going on. The enemy of all has come down with great anger and is at war with us (Rev 12:17). In both of Revelation's chapters 12 and 14 there is a particular group of people who receive the enemy's full arsenal and attention. Those people are again described by character and belief in God through faith in Jesus: not labels of organizations or groups, but identified by their experiential quality. The enemy will do all that he can to keep us from being part of that group of God-focused people. Let us keep our eyes riveted on the ultimate goal and not be deceived by Operation Cookie Cutter or any other plan to take our vision off of the message and purpose of this church. Remember the age-old reminder: those who fail to learn from history's mistakes are doomed to repeat them. Let's learn from these lessons from war!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>I have put "converting" in quotes because that raises a whole larger conversation about what the actual goal is and how certain language has become so charged with other meanings today. If you want to wrestle with this concept I would suggest you read Carl Medearis' books: *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, and *Speaking of Jesus*, or Mark Siljander's Book: *A Deadly Misunderstanding*.

<sup>2</sup>Please consider the implications of *Desire of Ages*, p. 141-142: "Now that Jesus has ascended to heaven, His disciples are His representatives among men, and one of the most effective ways of winning souls to Him is in exemplifying His character in our daily life. Our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested [unconditional, no-strings-attached] love is an argument they cannot gainsay. A consistent life, characterized by the meekness of Christ, is a power in the world." I added the brackets and explanation.

<sup>3</sup>Case in point, the LEAD Conference in Lombok, Indonesia, 2012. Both Elder Gulfan and Elder Lubis shared from the front the serious need for our pastors to focus on deeper work and follow up in our witness, that

baptisms were only the beginning and not the only marker for a faithful witness. This is a great beginning to combat the insidious effects of Operation Cookie Cutter.

<sup>4</sup>This quote should show there is a pivotal difference in how we should be working through agreement, not contrast. "Brethren, as you go forth to labor for those who are bound in chains of prejudice and ignorance, you will need to exercise the same divine wisdom that Paul manifested. When, as you labor in a place, you see that the scales are beginning to fall from men's eyes, that they see people as trees walking, be very careful not to present the truth in such a way as to arouse prejudice and close the door of the heart to further light. *Agree with the people on every point where you can consistently do so. Let them see that you love their souls, and want to be in harmony with them as far as possible. If the love of Christ is revealed in all your efforts, you will be able to sow the seeds of truth in some hearts. God will water the seed sown, and the truth will spring up and bear fruit to his glory*" (White, 1912, *Review and Herald*, June 13, 1912 par. 4; italics supplied).

<sup>5</sup>We must not forget the powerful statement by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*, "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" It is only when we are willing to do exactly that through surrender to God that we can have hope of changing these attitudes.

<sup>6</sup>There are still Seventh-day Adventist preachers who do not teach this and it is very unfortunate and damaging to our compassionate understanding and witness. For additional information on this subject see Volf (2011) and Brown 2006:79-82.

<sup>7</sup>For a much longer conversation about this subject with some use of definitions timely to this discussion see Joseph Cumming's article in *Christianity Today*, December 2009, or online at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/december/index.html?paging=off>

<sup>8</sup>This discussion could go many directions. Let me simply say this for the sake of our ongoing conversation: I am making a distinction here between historic Christianity and what we might call true believers. As Seventh-day Adventists we believe and teach that Revelation shows how the religion of Christianity apostatized and has missed the mark and how God has continued to reform, renew, call out, and even discipline it because of its pagan compromises. Therefore, my use of the word here does not reference true biblical beliefs, but the cultural and theological history of Christianity, which we teach was in apostasy from AD 538-1798 and will again be involved in the final moments persecuting God's remnant

people. For an interesting look at some of the lingering pagan influences outside of the normal Adventist teachings, read *Pagan Christianity*, by Frank Viola and George Barna. We may be surprised and reminded that ongoing reform is needed, even in our Adventist culture and religion.

<sup>9</sup>For a fuller explanation of this and a very persuasive discussion of this thought, see Jon Dybdahl's article, "Doing Theology in Mission, Part 2," in *Ministry Magazine*, January, 2006, or online at: <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2006/january/doing-theology-in-mission.html>

<sup>10</sup>This by no means challenges the biblical picture of the Godhead or the nature of Christ. Those can be shown in many other ways that do not concern this discussion. But, it is important to state it this way because so much of the trouble facing any serious Adventist Muslim interaction is immediately derailed by the age old arguments of Trinity and the nature of Jesus (some of those arguments have split historic churches as well). By our choosing to communicate and remain in a fully monotheistic setting (which of course, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share by definition), we can avoid endless debate and build on the true focus of our message and the message that is waiting to be given to the world — worship God!

<sup>11</sup>This will be a problematic sentence, but it must be said. There is an interesting polarization around Jesus that is threatening to eclipse God. People can be so focused on arguing about Jesus (his nature, roles, origins, etc.) that the larger point is completely missed. He came to reconnect us with God. Through the Messiah, we now have access again to God. Jesus as the Word made flesh, as the Messiah, as the clearest representation of the character of God, as prophet, priest, king, sacrifice, all of it; Jesus is the eternal daysman, the ladder connecting earth with heaven. Please note, if we argue about the ladder but never go on towards God because of the theological mysteries of the ladder, we will have utterly failed to realize the reason why Jesus came. Since the focus of this paper is not to be entrenched here, let me simply encourage the reader to peruse some recent writings by N. T. Wright. Both *Simply Jesus* and *When God Became King* are fantastic and go a long way towards educating mainstream biblical Christianity towards a view that maintains a balanced monotheism. In addition to those two books, of course, *Desire of Ages* is truly phenomenal!

<sup>12</sup>See *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 415, regarding the "last message of mercy."

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